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SENSITIVE
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DEPT FOR AF/E AND DRL
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E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: NGO STAFF TAKEN AT GUNPOINT

REF: ASMARA 417

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Government of the State of Eritrea (GSE) soldiers invaded NGO compounds August 14, rounding up local employees (reftel). Though most employees were later returned, the GSE took several to the Wi'a military prison camp. Employees of diplomatic missions were not affected, although rumors indicate that the GSE may attempt to do the same to Embassy locally engaged staff in the near future. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On Thursday evening reports circulated of GSE soldiers storming NGO compounds guns drawn, demanding all local employees to come with them. The director of Dutch Interchurch Aid (DIA) later corroborated these reports. Accordingly, the director stated that 15 soldiers invaded the DIA main office around 4pm, thoroughly searching for local employees, including on the roof and in the bathroom. The soldiers took DIA's entire staff into custody. Similar reports streamed in from five of the other eight international NGOs (Norwegian Church Aid, Catholic Relief Services, OXFAM, Gruppo Missioni Asmarino, and Istituto Sindacale Di Cooperazione Allo Sviluppo). Soldiers also abducted staff from two local NGOs, Vision Eritrea and Toker International, looking for specific individuals on a list rather than taking the entire workforce (soldiers took 20 from Vision Eritrea and three from Toker International). Soldiers also searched the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) compound for five specific individuals, one of which was present and taken by the soldiers.

¶3. (SBU) The soldiers took the staff from international NGOs to Police Station No. 1 and those from local NGOs to Police Station No. 6, the director stated. GSE officials then called out individual names, ordering those whose names were called to stay; the rest were released. The DIA director reported that about 10 names from various NGOs were called; GSE officials transported these individuals to Adi Abeto, a transit point before being sent to the Wi'a military prison camp. The director speculated that officials released those who have completed national service, while younger employees (those most likely to have escaped national service thus far) were taken to Wi'a.

¶4. (SBU) COMMENT: Rumors swirl that the GSE will soon attempt to round up Embassy locally engaged staff in a similar fashion. While Post does not believe the GSE would storm Embassy compounds, we believe they would set up checkpoints along common travelling routes in order to check

employees for identification and national service completion
papers. End Comment.
TABLER-STONE